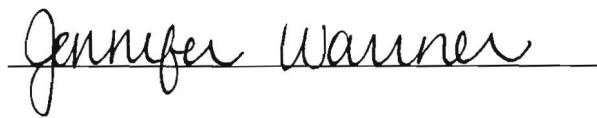


A Journey into Creative Nonfiction: Just Write It

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By: Jonathan Neal

Thesis Advisor: Jennifer Warrner

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jennifer Warrner", is written over a horizontal line.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

04/2008

Date of Graduation: May 3, 2008

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Course Title: A Journey into Creative Nonfiction - Just Write It.

Overview of Course

This course is designed for around 25 students who can be from a variety of disciplines. It is intended for undergraduates who are at sophomore standing or above and have completed the required prerequisites, which are the two English requirements. This course will be listed under the English department but has a strong tie with the journalism department as well. Students with majors or minors in writing, English, journalism, public relations, advertising, telecommunications or communication will particularly benefit from the material. From memoirs and essays to blogs and personal reflections, students will have the freedom to explore the forms of creative nonfiction.

Catalog Description

This is a course designed for those interested in exploring creative nonfiction writing, or literary journalism. The purpose of the course is to give students a chance to write creatively, expressively and personally. Students will have the opportunity to write numerous small pieces and four larger papers with much flexibility in terms of content or form.

The course will challenge students to write more often, with more confidence and with more desire to have their work published for others. Students will engage in immersive learning through a fieldtrip, lively discussions, films and special speakers.

Just Write It



**For those who
have a heart to
write ...**



Jonathan David Neal
Honors Thesis
Spring 2008

Jonathan D. Neal

Thesis Abstract

Everyday we come across ideas, situations, places or people that could inspire us to write something about them, yet the opportunities often slip by us. Thus, a hypothetical college course has been designed with the purpose of encouraging undergraduate students to see the limitless opportunities in which to write. An excellent genre with which to do this is through the art of writing creative nonfiction. This course is titled, “A Journey into Creative Nonfiction – Just Write It.” Through examining various forms of creative nonfiction, such as journals, memoirs, essays and features, students will be allowed to explore their writing capabilities and broaden their views on writing in general. This course includes sample lesson plans, a course syllabus and calendar, references and week-by-week materials for each class. The course provides students with a sense of the past, present and future of these writing forms and allows them to creatively make their own definitions of their writing. The essence of the project is to raise people’s interest in writing on a consistent basis in order to better themselves, their readers and their world.

Honors College
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Jennifer Warrner, for her encouragement and advice during the time that I worked on the project. She was always willing to meet and offer helpful hints toward my progress.

I would also like to thank Mark Masse, professor of journalism, for his consultation on the topics of creative nonfiction and the designing of college writing courses.

Just Write It

Instructor: Jonathan Neal

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Phone: (765) 524-1901

Office hours: Arranged, Tuesday and Thursday AC 212

Class: Tuesday and Thursday, 10 – 11:15 p.m.

Course Description:

This course will provide students with an opportunity to write creatively and expressively through a variety of articles, journals and stories on given prompts. The course will allow students to write their thoughts on events and situations in their lives and the people around them. Through readings, assignments, movies and lectures, students will be prepared to write columns in newspapers or magazines and may even get the inspiration to author a book someday. Ultimately, the course will encourage students to use writing in their daily lives to express themselves, their relationships with others, and their society.

Prerequisites:

You must have completed ENG 103 and 104 or 114 to be registered to be in this class. In addition, you must be at a sophomore status. This course is open to all majors.

Required Texts:

Zinsser, William. "On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction."
HarperCollins Publishers: New York City, 2006 reprinted.

Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. "Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for
Crafting Great Nonfiction." Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, Calif., 2001 reprinted.

Supplementary Texts:

You are encouraged to read portions of any of the additional texts supplied on the first day of class. Although they are not required, you will benefit greatly from the information. They range from magazines and books to Web sites. They will serve as references as well for your own writing.

Class Schedule:

I've supplied you with a class schedule that outlines what I've planned for each class that we meet. It relays the information regarding when the assignments and readings are due as well. This is a blueprint for the class, but it is in no wise "set in stone." Flexibility and spontaneity are encouraged in this class.

Course Requirements and Assignments:

900 points possible

Attendance and Participation : Attendance to class is important for you to really benefit from the discussions and in-class learning. It's hard to participate if you're not in class. However, if you would be absent for any reason, please notify Jonathan prior to the beginning of class. You do yourself and your classmates a great service by being there each class period. Your attendance and participation will be worth a total of **250 points**.

Major Written Assignments: You will have four major writing assignments in this class. They include an essay, a memoir, a feature and your final project of your choice. These will 100 points each for a **total of 400 points**.

Quizzes: You will have three quizzes over the duration of the semester, which will cover material discussed in class. The quizzes will be 25 points each, totaling **75 points**.

Weekly Course Readings: You will be expected to read the assigned handouts, articles or other materials in which I hand out throughout the semester. You will also be expected to look through/ read the required texts, which I listed at the beginning of the syllabus. These readings will help you develop your writing so that it is engaging, clear and enjoyable.

Personal Writings: This is your chance to do what you've been wanting to do – write. These pieces will be more personal and will be graded more on completion. There will be six of these during the semester at 25 points each, for a total of **150 points**.

Class Presentations: This is the final portion of the class will be presenting your final projects to the class. You will select a format of your choice for the final project, write it and then collaborate with your classmates to make a book that will hold all of your final writings. Your presentation of your part of the book will be worth **25 points**.

Grading Scale:

92 – 100 %	A	80 – 82 %	B-
90 – 92%	A-	78 – 80 %	C+
88 – 90 %	B+	72 – 78 %	C
82 – 88 %	B	70 – 72 %	C –
		68 – 70 %	D+
		< 68 %	Not passing class

Special Needs:

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please talk to Jonathan as soon as possible.

Diversity Statement:

As Ball State University values diversity and is committed to raising awareness of the great variety of people and opinions we have on campus. We will do the same in this class, as it will build respect and support during the semester.

Thanks for choosing to be a part of this class. I'm open for your comments and suggestions throughout the class. My goal is to be a channel by which you may grasp the endless possibilities with writing so that you can be creative, expressive and say what you want to say without limitations. This is your chance to write from your heart instead of just your head. Although I will expect you to follow basic journalistic guidelines...such as spelling...you may bend the rules a little for our purposes. Perfection isn't the goal. Expression, creativity and ingenuity are. Consider yourself an artist.

~ Jonathan d. Neal

Quotes:

- “Writing itself is an act of faith, and nothing else.” – E. B. White
- “Writing is my refuge. It’s where I go. It’s where I find that integrity I have.”
- Charles Johnson from *The World and I*
- “How can one not dream while writing? It is the pen which dreams. The blank page gives the right to dream.” - Gaston Bachelard
- “The mere habit of writing, of constantly keeping at it, of never giving up, ultimately teaches you how to write.” - Gabriel Fielding

Tentative Course Calendar - Fall 2008

Mr. Jonathan D. Neal
Just Write It: A Journey into Creative Nonfiction

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday	Notes	Assignments
8/26/08 8/28/08 Week 1	Welcome and Introductions Course overview Intro. to writing	Writing Intro. / Discussion Writing outlets First Assignment		Write a short (1-2 pages) journal entry on your first week of school (Due: 8/31) Read: handout
9/2/08 9/4/08 2	Idea Generation Importance and influence of ideas Assignment 2	Ideas and Observing Break-out groups to discuss ideas Lecture: Using Your Senses		Assignment 2: Come up with five good ideas to write about in a format of your choice (story, essay, journal, etc.)
9/9/08 9/11/08 3	Overview of Writing Formats Different uses and styles of writing	Overview Continued Combining ideas, writing structure, content and purpose Assignment 3		Read/Analyze: Ch.1-4 (Zinsser) Choose a writing form of creative nonfiction and write 1-2 pages (Due: 9/14)
9/16/08 9/18/08 4	Journey into English Tools Profound Prose Assignment: Blog	Intro. to Essay Writing Types of Essays Analyzing reading		Read: 2 chapters of choice (Zinsser) Write: 1 page journal/blog (Due: 9/22)
9/23/08 9/25/08 5	Essay Writing Issue/Persuasive Essays – Writing and Ideas	Essay Writing Personal/Reflective essays Open forum for questions on topic Assignment 4		Read: 2 chapters of choice (Zinsser) Read: 1, 2, 10 (Cheney) Write: 3-4 page essay of choice (Due: 10/2)

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday	Notes	Assignments
9/30/08 10/02/08 6	History Week Introduction Famous Writers Assign: Readings	Emerson and White Discuss readings Discuss why their writing became classic		Reading: Emerson and E.B. White handouts
10/07/08 10/09/08 7	Video: <i>Finding Forrester</i> Watch good portion and discuss	Intro: Memoirs Discuss purpose/use Quiz 1 : Writing tools/selected writers		Reading: Sample from Josh Wolk, Ch. 14 (Zinsser)
10/14/08 10/16/08 8	Exploring Memoirs Personal Reflections and experiences Assign: Memoir	Finish Memoirs Share writings with class (small groups)		Reading: Ch. 7 (Cheney) Memoir: Write 2-3 pages (personal experience) Due: 10/16
10/21/08 10/23/08 9	Personal Writing Writing on feelings, emotions and thoughts	Journal writing Personal writing and how it helps		Journal: Write as many pages as you want – personal. May or may not officially “turn in.”
10/28/08 10/30/08 10	Intro. to Feature Writing The joy of writing features	Feature Writing Different forms Use in newspapers, magazines, novels		Write: Feature of choice Due: 11/04 Reading: Poynter
11/04/08 11/06/08 11	Feature Writing: Travel pieces From London to South Africa ...to a college road trip	Features: Profiles Getting interested in people, their stories and giving them life		Write: 1-2 page - either a travel or profile piece Due: 11/11 Reading: Samples from supplementary text
11/11/08 11/13/08 12	Inspirational Writing Faith, Family and the Core of Life	Speech writing: Being creative and motivational Quiz 2: Readings over feature writing		Write: 1-2 page inspirational paper on topic of choice Read: Ch. 25 (Zinsser)
11/18/08 11/20/08 13	Fieldtrip Indianapolis Monthly	Blogs: Function and Fun of blog writing		Reading: Sample handouts Write a sample blog: Due 11/25

Dates	Tuesday	Thursday	Notes	Assignments
11/25/08 No class 14	Applying your writing Use of writing for variety of purposes	<i>Happy Thanksgiving!</i>		Reading: Sample handouts
12/2/08 12/4/08 15	Freelancing, Writing as a profession Quiz 3: Creative nonfiction forms	Special speaker: Barbara Shoup		Final project: Choose 1 creative nonfiction form and write a 4 page quality paper that will go in class book
12/9/08 12/11/08 16	Class presentations	Class presentations/ Reflect on semester		Final paper/presentation Due this week
Finals Week	Final class wrap-up Class party – Refreshments and free time for discussion			

Sample Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan**Week 4****9/16/08****Title: Journey into English Tools****Lesson topic**

During this class, we will explore the various rhetorical tools writers use in their writing to make it more descriptive, interesting and valuable. The purpose is to show the students how they can use these in their own writing, which will set them apart from other writers. Whether writing an essay, a feature story or any other type of creative nonfiction, this content can be useful. I'll also discuss how and when to use the language devices, such as figures of speech.

Learning objectives

- Students will learn important tools to use in their writing.
- Students will learn how to distinguish the tools and when to use them in creative nonfiction writing.
- Students will build their English rhetoric vocabulary.
- Students will recognize the "art" of writing.

Good sources for content

The Purdue Online Writing Lab. <http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu>

Top 20 Figures of Speech. <http://grammar.about.com/od/rhetoricstyle/a/20figures.htm>

Content

Definitions and concepts that will be covered include:

- Figures of speech
- Simile
- Metaphor
- Alliteration
- Analogies
- Allegory
- Exaggeration
- Sarcasm
- Satire
- Onomatopoeia
- Nostalgia
- Exaggeration
- Euphemism
- Repetition of words or phrases
- Allusion
- Irony

Discussion on how these parts of rhetoric can be used properly and how they benefit writers

Materials

The students will need to take notes on the lecture and discussion.

I will provide a PowerPoint presentation to accompany the content.

Text: Zinsser – chapter on style

Lesson Flow

- We will begin class with a general discussion on what the students enjoy about their favorite publications or authors' material.
- Discussion questions:
What makes the writing meaningful, humorous or engaging?
What types of language tools do they use that you like?
- I will then introduce the topic of the day and go through a short lecture.
- I will go through the meanings and uses of the words listed in the content section.
- We will then touch on Zinsser's chapter on style and relate it to the lesson.
- We'll finish the lesson with their conclusions and reflections on the topic.

Assignment

They will read two chapters of their choosing of the Zinsser text.

I'll also assign them to write a one page journal or blog, which is due the following Tuesday.

Evaluation

Each student should be actively involved in the discussion and add his/her comments to add to the class. The class should feel confident that they understand and can apply some of the techniques discussed to their own writing. I'll encourage them to use one or more of the rhetorical techniques in the one page journal or blog that they write. They should also be able to identify the techniques in further readings that we do from other creative nonfiction writers.

Lesson Plan

Week 5

9/23/08

Title: Essay Writing – Persuading and Informing

Lesson topic

We will dive into the craft of essay writing. We'll first review the material from the introduction on essays, and then we'll focus our attention on writing persuasive, descriptive and expository essays. I'll encourage the class to think creatively when coming up with ideas for ideas. We'll also discuss where to get ideas to write these types of essays.

Learning objectives

- Students will be able to distinguish different types of essays.
- Students will learn how to create ideas for essay topics.
- Students will recognize the importance of developing a style and creating a voice for their essay writing.
- Students will become knowledgeable on the art of persuasive writing.

References

The Purdue Online Writing Lab. "Essay Writing." <http://owl.english.purude.edu/owl/resourace/>
Textbook: Cheney, Theodore A. "Writing Creative Nonfiction."

Content

Four different genres of essays:

- The Persuasive Essay
- The Narrative Essay
- The Expository Essay
- The Descriptive Essay

Persuasive essay: goal is to persuade through concise and clear language to the reader regarding a certain view, product, issue or circumstance in order to help them see and possibly adopt your position

Narrative essay: similar to storytelling, where the writer may recall a personal experience or situation and then relate it to a bigger theme or message (The use of 'I' is encouraged in this genre.)

Expository essay: writing on an idea or concept where you provide research or evidence and then propose a clear argument or point of view on a topic (This is commonly used in classroom settings.)

Descriptive essay: writing on a particular place, person, situation or 'slice of life' where creativity is a must

How do you gather ideas for your essays? A few are listed below:

1. Observations
2. Societal issues
3. Problems or challenges in your peer group or life stage
4. History
5. Pop culture
6. 'Slice of life' – then relate it to a greater whole
7. Events – such as marriage, graduation, birthdays, holidays and first dates

Materials:

Blackboard or dry-erase board

Students will need materials to take notes.

Handout: an essay of mine titled "Band Problems"

Text: Cheney's text

Lesson Flow:

- I will begin the class with a quote for an ice-breaker. Quote from textbook (pg. 258 of Cheney): "An essay, though it takes as many shapes as weather or daylight, always has the immediacy of a real voice..." Maureen Howard, editor of Contemporary American Essays. We'll discuss what this quote means.
- Discussion questions:
What types of essays are you most familiar with?
What are the essays that seemed to attract your attention the most or the least?
- I will then lead them in a quick review of the four genres of essays we are studying.
- I will provide a conversational lecture on expository, descriptive and persuasive essays.
- We will brainstorm how to get ideas for essays. What makes a good topic for an essay?
- We will discuss the handout that is listed above.
- The class will conclude with my assigning them their weekly reading and answering any questions they may have on the lesson or the schedule.

Assignment:

They will read two chapters of their choice in the Zinsser text.

Also, they will need to read chapters 1 and 2 in the Cheney text.

Evaluation:

The students should know there are various types of essays, with different styles and forms. They should be confident that they can brainstorm creative ideas for a variety of essays. They also should be able to distinguish the different genres apart, like the difference between an expository and a persuasive essay.

Lesson Plan
Week 10
10/30/08

Title: Feature Writing - Endless possibilities

Lesson topic

This class will be one of the more informative lessons of the semester. The topic is feature writing, and the goal is to just glaze over the surface of this vast subject to give students a 'feel' of what feature writing is like. I plan to provide them with examples and divide feature writing into broad categories to help them segment their ideas. A few categories or forms of feature writing include the following: profiles, travel articles, technology, popular culture, sports, service, corporate, seasonal stories, entertainment, food, health, fashion and many more. The lesson will inform students on what makes a feature different from other forms of nonfiction and how to generate ideas for interesting and entertaining feature stories for the media.

Learning objectives

- Students will learn different types of features.
- Students will be able to generate ideas for and write feature stories.
- Students will understand the dynamics of features stories.
- Students will practice writing a feature through an assignment.

References

Garrison, Bruce. "Professional Feature Writing." Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Mahwah, New Jersey, 2004.

Zinsser, William. "On Writing Well." HarpersCollins Publishers: New York City, 2006 reprinted.

Content

Features – Basics (Review)

They are often used in newspapers, magazines and trade publications.
They can have news values, but they aren't news stories.
Features rely on the writer's keen sense of observation and description.
Features should be relevant and may have a time peg.
They aren't really long.
They should have personality.

Human interest stories – What are they?

These features focus on people- their strengths, weaknesses, situations, accomplishments, relations and the list goes on. They often bring out common challenges or problems. They may relay information on a unique experience a person has had. Sprinkled with emotion and personality, they bring the humanity of the world to the reader's attention.

Possible sources for features:

1. Co-workers/jobs

2. Neighbors
3. Church members
4. Places – malls, carnivals, gyms, graduations, stores, etc.
5. Restaurants
6. Schools – colleges
7. People of all kinds (Along with many others – sources for features are all around)

Excellent and colorful quotes can add description and imagery to the feature.

The first few sentences (the lead) are important because it draws the reader into the story.

Jot down your ideas when they come to you about possible feature stories. Take advantage of these 'light bulb' moments. You may want to carry a notebook with you for these times.

Staying current on the news, developing an involved lifestyle, meeting new people and being up-to-speed on trends can help you write better features and relate more to your audiences.

Materials

Blackboard or dry-erase board

Handouts: "The Art of the Revealing Detail"

"Reviving the Feature Story" by Roy Peter Clark – Poynter.org

Lesson Flow

- We will begin the class with a short review of what features are and their use in the media.
- I will lead them in a discussion about the different types of features.
- Then, I'll pass out the handout from the Poynter Institute. We'll discuss the seven characteristics the author proposes and the overall message of the article.
- In the middle of the class time, I'll break the class into small groups for them to think up ideas for feature stories and talk about what may work best for each individual to write.
- I'll explain the assignment, which is for them to write a feature story of their choice.
- Lastly, I'll share some concluding remarks about the way observation and description play such a role in creating interesting content within features.

Assignment

They will need to write a feature of their choice, which will be due the following week. The length is between 2-4 pages.

Evaluation

The students should be able to know a feature when they see it and understand what makes the writing good or not so good. They should understand that features should be more about human interest than anything else and that they should be engaging, informative and to some degree entertaining. Their ability to write a feature will be reflected in their assignment. Through the assignment, I'll see whether they understood the basics or if we need to review and reinforce the key aspects of a feature.

Lesson Plan

Week 11

11/03/08

Title: Travel pieces – From London to South Africa...to a college road trip

Lesson topic

This lesson will focus entirely on writing travel features and about one's experiences at a certain destination. The purpose of the lesson will be to teach the students the basics of travel writing and to spur their interest into doing it. Whether they go on an elaborate tour of Europe or a road trip to the woods, travel writing can be an enjoyable form of writing. It is also somewhat difficult. I'll explain the challenges but also the opportunities that people have in writing this type of feature. More and more readers are purchasing written material on travel, so freelancing in this area is quite popular.

Learning objectives

- Students will learn some key aspects of travel writing.
- Students will understand the pitfalls of such writing and how to avoid them, and instead engage their readers with description and unique experiences.
- Students will visually see how a travel piece may be constructed through the aid of the handouts.
- Students will be able to better choose the content and style for this type of feature.
- Students should become interested in travel writing and want to practice it in the future.

References

Garrison, Bruce. "Professional Feature Writing." Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Mahwah, New Jersey, 2004.

Zinsser, William. "On Writing Well." HarpersCollins Publishers: New York City, 2006.

Content

Travel writing can be very enjoyable and can be written within a variety of contexts and styles.

Need to define your audience

1. Yourself
2. Not published – friends, family or other readers
3. Published – magazine or newsletters - what type?
4. Published – newspaper - national or local?
5. Published – books

This is important because it helps you choose your content and writing style.

Travel writing may be easy if you're going for "average." But, it's hard if you really want to be good. Be careful with your words and avoid too many clichés, which are common in travel writing.

Being prepared to write the feature is crucial. Know the location through study.

Use description, color and observations.

Example: Describe the landscape thoroughly. Describe the moods of those around you.
Describe how the air felt to your skin. Observe the people's clothing.
What's the pace like? What hidden gem is there within the location?

The lead or top of the "nut graph" is important. It gets the reader into the story.

Feel free to integrate people into these primarily places articles. People are interesting too.

Examples of professional travel writing:

The New York Times travel section, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Backpacker*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Town and Country*, The Chicago Tribune's travel section, *Home and Away* by AAA and *Sunset*

Materials

Handouts: "Going My Way?" from *Travel & Leisure*

"Into The Woods" from *Town & Country Travel*

"Secrets of the Bazaar" from *Town & Country Travel*

Lesson Flow

- I'll begin class with asking the students to briefly talk about any places they have traveled to or their favorite locations. Why did they enjoy it? What did it offer that was special?
- Then, I'll introduce the topic and talk about the different ways travel writing can be used.
- I'll provide a lesson on how to write quality travel features.
- Next, I'll provide the class with the magazine handouts, and we'll discuss what they like or dislike about the articles.
- Lastly, we'll practice our scene setting skills. I'll have them write a list of words or phrases to describe their favorite city they've been to in the United States.

Assignment

The students will need to read the handout on travel writing from Garrison's text.

Evaluation

The class will be a success if I have piqued the students' interest in travel writing and they have learned more about the subject. Of course, they won't be experts within this short time, but it will give them a taste of what feature travel writing is like. Also, they will have a choice of writing either a travel or profile piece that is 1-2 pages in length. Those who choose to write the travel piece will show to me whether they understood some of the basics of the lesson.

Lesson Plan
Week 15
12/02/08

Title: Freelancing and writing as a profession

Lesson topic

This lesson is meant to give the students a taste of how they can use their writing in the professional world. Whether by serving as a part-time freelancer for a magazine or submitting a column for an online inspirational Web site, they can take their skills and ideas to a variety of writing markets. During the class, we'll discuss the importance of finding the right markets for publications and the types of positions that are available to professional writers.

Learning objectives

- Students will learn the different ways they can have their writing published.
- Student will be aware of the various markets of the media.
- Students will realize the importance of pitching and marketing their writing.
- Students can see that creative nonfiction writing has a prime place in the professional writing world.

References

Garrison, Bruce. "Professional Feature Writing." Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Mahwah, New Jersey, 2004.

Kallan, Richard A. "Tom Wolfe." Edited by: Thomas Connery. "A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism." Greenwood Press: Westport, Conn., 1992.

Content

Various media to publish creative nonfiction:

Newspapers, magazines, journals, newsletters Web sites, books...you name it.

Supply the students with a working definition of "freelance."

It's important to establish good relationships with the editors or other representatives of the place you want or are being published.

Finding the right medium and the right market is also crucial. What fits your style? What fits your content the best?

There are more opportunities than ever before, especially with all the new online sources. More niche magazines and journals are on the shelves or in libraries than ever before.

Marketing and pitching your material persuasively sets you apart from your competition. Be persuasive without being demanding or sounding needy.

Four step process by Lorene Duquin (Garrison, 238)

1. Capture the idea
2. Develop the idea
3. Tailor the idea
4. Test the idea

Tom Wolfe – a journalist who used creative and literary techniques in his writings and was founder of “new journalism”

- created scenes for his readers
- used dialogue as a way to add to his content and tell the story
- used description, personality and various points of view in his articles
- displayed American culture distinctively

Materials

The Writer magazine: Vol. 121, Issue 2. Feb. 2008.

Quiz 3 on creative nonfiction forms

Lesson Flow

- Begin the class with briefing the students on the rest of the semester – talk about the special speaker coming, final project and the last week of class.
- Give the third quiz on creative nonfiction forms. This quiz will test the students on their ability to distinguish the different forms, such as the differences between memoirs, features and profiles.
- Present the lesson topic and have an informal lecture and discussion on professional writing and freelance writing.
- I’ll talk briefly about Tom Wolfe’s expertise in literary journalism.
- Open the floor to the students to ask any questions they have on the topic.
- Then, I’ll pass around the sample magazine for the students to view.

Assignment

Assign the final project, in which the students will be required to choose one of genres and write a four page paper. As a class, we’ll combine these articles and put them into a class book that will feature the students’ writings.

Evaluation

I’ll evaluate the class on how interested they were in the content and the questions they asked. In addition, I can see how well they have learned the semester’s material through their scores on the last quiz.

Recommended Publications and References:

Below I've listed several books and a few Web sites that you may find helpful during the course. I've consulted most of these sources to develop this course. Even if you only have a few extra minutes and can read a portion out of the source, I'm sure it would benefit you. Enjoy!

Anderson, Chris. "Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy." Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989.

Burch, Beth C. "Writing for Your Portfolio." Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999.

Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. "Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction." Ten Speed Press: Berkeley, Calif., 2001 reprinted.

Connery, Thomas B. ed. "A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism – Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre." Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992.

English, Leona M. and Marie A. Gillen eds. "Promoting Journal Writing in Adult Education." New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2001.

Garrison, Bruce. "Professional Feature Writing." Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: Mahwah, New Jersey, 2004.

Reid, Stephen. "The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers." 3rd Edition. Colorado State University. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Reilly, Rick. "A Day in the Life Of Columbus." Sports Illustrated. (pp. 132). Nov. 19, 2007.

Quotidiana. Web site. <http://essays.quotidiana.org>

Steinbeck, John. "The East of Eden Letters." New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1969.

Travel + Leisure. Web site/Magazine. <http://www.travelandleisure.com/>

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Process, Thoughts and Conclusions of Thesis

While pondering a topic to pursue for my senior thesis, I was encouraged to work on a project that incorporated a subject that I particularly found interesting. Although the idea of writing a course on creative nonfiction wasn't exactly an epiphany, it did come to me rather spontaneously. I would be walking to class or thinking before going to bed and an idea would come to me about a particular concept or personal observation. During these times, I would want to write about these ideas and thoughts. As I began to realize that this happened often, I wondered what would happen if I actually did write these things down. For example, what if I wrote a description on how it felt to walk through a large city at night when everyone else was at home. What if I wrote on my experiences with former roommates? How about writing on the concept of the high school lunch room and all the drama that it included?

These ideas inspired me to explore a type of writing called creative nonfiction and literary journalism. When it came time to make a thesis proposal, I knew that I wanted to create a course on this type of writing. My passion for writing has been with me since I was a child, and I wanted to pass this on hypothetically to a class of students. I hope that one day I will be able to teach a college course on this subject and possibly use some of the material I have gathered for this thesis.

I have designed the course to allow students to explore a variety of forms and genres of writing. Although they all fall under the category of "nonfiction," many fiction techniques can be used as well. I wanted to relay the message to the students that writing can be an important part of a person's life. It can be used as a medium to communicate messages, emotions and knowledge. It doesn't always have to be structured. The concept of stream of conscience writing can be applied to some of the sections of this course. The importance of journal writing and its

uses for a person is also clear. In addition, features, essays, memoirs and blogs are also genres that allow writers to write on specific issues, situations, people or places and provide a “slice of life” to targeted readers.

Throughout my time in gathering content and handouts for the class, I learned so much about writing. I’ve concluded that this form of writing is probably the oldest known to man but also hasn’t been tapped into enough by people. Too often, people leave writing to professionals who have two Masters degrees in journalism and have written for 20 years at a newspaper. However, we must realize that writing is just communicating through a language. How rich were the words of King David from the Bible who was writing his feelings and emotions. Oh the meaning of the sentences and words constructed by war heroes who wrote letters of their experiences in foreign countries to their wives back in the United States. For thousands of years, the written word has impacted society. From the writer who writes speeches for presidential candidates to the college student who writes in a journal about his or her life, the writing helps shapes our lives and make some sort of sense to our lives.

My prediction is that creative nonfiction will continue to grow and expand. More people than ever have access to a computer and are writing on the World Wide Web. Just in the past 10 years, blogs have exploded. Corporate executives are encouraged to write about trends in their industries. Teenagers use blogs to relay feelings, questions, concerns and information to their friends. In addition, there has been a growth in leaders of all fields writing novels on their thoughts and ideas on every subject from business to religion. The bookstores and magazine shelves are full because people from all walks of life are writing.

This course’s purpose is to provide students with the inspiration and knowledge to be a leader in this business and lifestyle. It is designed to allow students the freedom to play with

different forms of writing to see what fits them the best. The result will be that the students have the knowledge, techniques and creative ideas to write...and enjoy it. From this, a student may want to write columns for a newspaper or magazine, start a personal journal, write copy for an advertising firm or even write a book that is a compilation of humorous stories about their lives. Whatever the influence, the class will break from the ordinary and create an atmosphere that motivates the students to "just write it."

Introduce Yourself!

Name _____

Major(s) _____

Minors(s) _____

Year _____

E-mail _____

Hometown _____

1. What made you choose to take this class?
2. What do you like to do for fun?
3. If you could travel to one place this next year, where would it be and why?
4. What types of writing have you done in the past?
5. Describe your personal favorite class setting. (Discussion, activities, structured, etc.)

6. Are you a fan of any sports or sports teams?

7. What types of music do you listen to?

8. What's your favorite type of pizza?

Parting Words from J104

Ideas

- If you leave the house and don't see a potential story, you're not paying attention.
- The more ideas you come up with on your own, the fewer your editor has to give you (and that's better for everyone).
- A good idea is timely, local and interesting.
- If you're interested in a subject, trust readers will be too and that your interest will shine through the writing.
- Good reporters are at least a little interested in everything.
- Remember, you're only as good as your NEXT idea.

Sourcing/gathering facts

- Fake it till you make it: Don't let personal shyness or embarrassment stop you from gathering the facts you need.
- They have information. You need information. Don't take no for an answer.
- Seek the broadest possible array of opinions from the most diverse (in every sense) pool of resources you can access. Lazy reporters cheat the reading public.
- Be prepared to conduct many more interviews, gather much more information than your editor or your readers will give you credit for.
- Make yourself an expert on each subject you tackle. Immerse yourself in the topic.
- Toughness and empathy are not mutually exclusive.
- Don't take preconceived notions about people or how they live to interviews with you.
- There's no such thing as a stupid question. This does not mean interview subjects won't think you're stupid. Learn not to care.
- The best, most revealing interviews are the results of great conversations.
- Remember who you work for: not the people you interview, not the people who pay you, the readers. Let their interests guide you in seeking information — and in how you relay it.

The writing process

- Know how your brain works. Do you need an extensive outline? Or just an idea of a direction? Do you have to write the lede first? Or the end?
- Experiment with your routine when it bogs down. Writing for newspapers means writing well AND writing fast.
- A nutgraf (or a summary lede) tells readers why they should keep reading. Don't rely on them to keep going without a good sales pitch.
- If you don't focus, neither will the reader. All details, all description, all facts should bend to the gravity of some overall theme.
- How do you choose what information to include and what information to leave out? First, you've got to have the 5 W's and the H. Second, you must answer the questions that will naturally arise in the reader's mind. Third, follow your own instinct and what you think is important.

- There are countless ways to organize a story, and it doesn't matter which you choose. But you must choose.
- Readers are grown ups and they don't have to eat their vegetables if they don't want to. So don't hand them a list of dry facts. Tell them a story.

Grammar and AP style

- Good grammar is invisible. Keep it simple, clear and correct.
- Know your personal bad habits. If you can't eradicate them, post a note on your computer or mark that page in your grammar book and keep it handy.
- Keep current with AP style. If your book's in good shape, you're doing something wrong.
- Look it up, look it up, look it up.

Self-editing

- Every fact in your finished piece should be double checked against the original source.
- Scour your copy for your grammar tics and personal bad habits.
- Consider every way you can be fairer, more inclusive, more critical, more balanced.
- Beware passive voice, wordiness and overwrought description.
- Editing should take just as long as writing.

Poynteronline**Chip On Your Shoulder: Sharing the writing life with Chip Scanlan.**

MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2004

Breaking into Creative Nonfiction, Part 1: The Basics

Dear Chip:

I was wondering if you could give me any advice on breaking into the field of creative non-fiction. I'm a 45-year-old voracious reader who's always wanted to write, but in college I was too much the capitalist to endure the starving artist path and changed from an English major to Computer Science. I try to write 1,000 words a night in a journal and read "everything" but realize that's nothing more than doing mental push-ups and have no idea how to "get an assignment." Any tips or insight you could shed would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks.

Gary Leydon
Systems Administrator
Yale Univ. Sch. of Med
Department of Neurobiology

Dear Gary,

Thanks for writing.

I'd like to tackle your question in two parts. On Thursday, I'll address the challenges of breaking into the field. But let's start by defining "creative nonfiction," a term that confuses some and appalls others. ("You mean as opposed to 'uncreative nonfiction'?")

Creative nonfiction is also known as:

- The Art of Fact
- The Art of Truth
- Gonzo Journalism
- Neo-gonzo Journalism
- The Fourth Genre (after poetry, fiction and drama)
- The Literature of Reality
- New Journalism
- Literary Journalism
- Narrative Nonfiction

Whatever you call it -- and as you can tell from the list I've just enumerated, the genre goes by lots of names -- in the last decade there's been an explosion of interest in the form.

Creative nonfiction is the latest name for fact-based writing that can perhaps be best understood as the union of storytelling and journalism. In that respect, it's old wine in new bottles. Its lineage extends from the essays of Montaigne written in the 16th century to John Hersey's World War II documentary reportage in "Hiroshima."

By necessity, this is a primer, the barest outline drawn from a vast and growing literature on the subject. Here's a [reading list](#) of texts and anthologies,

accompanied by a sidebar of some online resources that expands this brief description.

What is it?

Creative nonfiction:

- Includes personal essay, memoir, literary journalism, academic/cultural criticism, narrative history, feature articles, documentary drama
- Braids "narrative telling with fictional and poetic techniques; Combines portraiture and self-reflection with reportage and critical analysis" (Root, Steinberg)
- Is "based on actual events, characters, and places; it is written with a special concern for language; and it tends to be more informal and personal than other types of nonfiction writing" (Minot)

How is it reported and written?

Creative nonfiction relies on:

- Immersion reporting and research
- Documents (public and private records)
- Tools of literary realism: Scene-by-scene construction; Dialogue: Point of View; Status details (Wolfe)
- Description (Sense of place, character, time)
- Reflection
- Narrative frames (Chronology; parallel narrative; In media res)
- Segmentation
- Extra-literary design
- The "line between fact and fiction" and John Hersey's "Legend on the License"
- None Of This Is Made Up

Where can you publish it?

Creative Nonfiction markets include newspapers, magazines, literary journals and books. Here's a short list of the major outlets:

- Fourth Genre
- River Teeth
- Creative Nonfiction
- The American Scholar
- Doubletake
- The Georgia Review
- Harper's
- The New Yorker
- Natural Bridge

[What's your favorite piece of creative nonfiction?]

>>Coming Thursday: Part 2, Breaking into Creative Nonfiction

Posted at 8:50:03 PM

Creative Nonfiction Resources
"Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-Ends Composition" By Wendy Bishop
"Creative Nonfiction Compendium" By Bruce Dobler
"Lines in the Mud -- Exploring Creative Nonfiction" By Aaron Pope
"This is What the Spaces Say" By Robert Root
"Tell it Long, Take Your Time, Go in Depth" By Steve Weinberg

In Praise of the Perfect White T-Shirt

Jennifer Brice

We've been locked in the world's box,

Love sets us free, time kills us.

—Adam Zagajewski, from "Little Waltz"

I teach English at a liberal arts college for women, where my students often linger after class for a bit of conversation or coddling. *Tell me again, what's Eliot's notion of the objective correlative?* And, *I'm sorry I was late for class. I'm taking a new medication....* I glance at my watch: 2:35 p.m. It's imperative that my 10-year-old daughter be fetched by 3 p.m. Her private school is 30 miles distant, in a suburb of Lynchburg, Virginia. On such days, I hit the road fuming—fuming at myself for losing track of time; at the indicator light in my car that warns I'm about to run out of gas; at my daughter whose first words will be, "You're late, Mom—*again*." What seems most at fault, however, is not me or my job or my daughter but time itself for being as relentless, inexorable, and powerful as a 50-foot wave propelling me, a helpless shred of flotsam toward a distant shore that was never on my itinerary.

My fury finds an outlet in the other southbound drivers on Route 29: construction workers jammed four abreast on the bench seat of a pickup, their beefy arms dangling out of open windows; stop-and-start driver's ed students with that ridiculous yellow hat Bungeed to the top of the car; Realtors (you can tell from the license plate) closing a deal on the cell phone while creeping along in the left lane; quivering ancients propped up on pillows so they can see over the dashboard. *Hey, Buddy! Guess what? The road is for driving!* No one has pulled a gun or a baseball bat on me yet.

Under The Sun

I haven't even been stopped for speeding, although—knock on wood—I richly deserve it.

Speeding is a symptom. The larger problem is not that I'm running late on a particular Tuesday in March, but that I'm always running late—always rushing to catch up to the woman off in the distance, just a few miles or minutes away, the one who's vanishing around a distant bend just as I'm entering the straightaway. The woman is me, of course. The real me. Who, then, is this caricature slaloming down Route 29, willing time to lobbing obscenities from behind sealed glass, willing time to tick backward or, at the very least, to stop for just a moment? Dear reader, I, too, would like to know.

Even for physicists, time is abstract—an inchoate concept that can be grasped, explained, quantified only in terms of the relative concrete. Try to talk intelligently about time and you lapse almost immediately into metaphor. Racing time. Killing time. The test of time. Time on your hands. Time to burn. Running late. Running early. As metaphors, these are pretty much DOA; over time (!), the words have untethered themselves from the image. When we say we're killing time, we're anthropomorphizing it. When we say that someone (almost always someone *else*) has time on her hands, we imply that time has mass. Last on the list, "running early," strikes me as particularly insipid; if one is likely to be early, why bother running at all?

One day recently, I was early—*running* early, if you must—to pick up my daughter. The extra few minutes made me feel lazy, decadent, unencumbered, foreign inside my own skin. I stopped at a bakery to buy a loaf of bread and a couple of cookies. Next door was a whimsically named boutique, Pheasant's Eye. For a few seconds, I stood outside the plate-glass windows, soaking up the still life of jewel-tone blouses, scarves, stemware, beaded bracelets and crystal drop earrings. I asked myself what, if anything, I needed. Nothing. I still had grading to do, but classes

Under The Sun

were over for the summer. If I wished, I could spend the next couple of months in shorts, tank tops and sandals. No makeup or jewelry, just sunscreen and a watch. I checked again. There was time to burn.

Ten minutes later, I left the boutique with a creased paper bag under my arm. The clerk had curled her lip slightly as she wrapped my purchase in a sheet of petal pink tissue, then, wordlessly, handed me change for my \$20 bill. The Lynchburg matrons who comprise the shop lady and country club set—blonde, bobbed, wallpapered in Lilly Pulitzer—might have looked down their over-bred noses at my purchase. I couldn't have cared less. I was flying high on shopping endorphins: the tension of desire giving way to the *Ah!* of fulfillment.

At home later, I'd slide my purchase out of the crackling bag, reverently unwrap the tissue paper, snip the tags, and place my neatly folded purchase in the middle drawer of my dresser. To the untrained eye, the contents of that particular drawer might appear to be a dozen or more identical white T-shirts. To me, the T-shirts are as easy to tell apart as my three daughters. Made by Fresh Produce, the one from Pheasant's Eye is constructed of thinly ribbed white cotton with a wide crew neckband. Among the rest are cotton crewnecks from Old Navy and Target; a cropped running shirt in a breathable cotton/polyester blend; a jersey shirt that tends to pill; a pair of boxy ribbed crewnecks from Chico's; a boat neck version with three-quarter sleeves; a long-sleeved, form-fitting jewel-neck; a plain v-neck; and an oversized crewneck emblazoned with my college's logo. As white T-shirts go, I suppose that's a lot. As collections go, however, it's negligible. Alice Harris, author of a pictorial history called *The White T*, confessed to an interviewer that she owns hundreds.

One of my students, a young woman of modest means, collects amber necklaces. Another student, a woman of significantly greater means, collects matchbooks. A decade or so ago, a friend

from work borrowed my kayaking gear. She kept it for two years. Shortly after she'd moved into a new apartment, she returned it in a battered cardboard box labeled "Little Black Dresses."

Why collect anything? Why silver spoons instead of stamps? Jazz CDs instead of Baccarat vases? Swatches of fabric instead of pincushions? Porcelain dogs, not salt-and-pepper shakers? Post-Impressionist paintings, not abstract sculptures? White T-shirts, not little black dresses? I know a woman who collects friends. Imagine an address book with all the gravitas of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Normally, I wouldn't count people as objects unless I actually treated them as collectibles: the thrill of pursuit, the fleeting pleasure of possession, followed by the inevitable let down, disappointment. Come to think of it, what is collecting but a compressed version of a love affair, endlessly repeated? When the shine is off, friends gather dust as readily as cranberry glass goblets.

Like other compulsive behaviors, collecting must strike the casual onlooker as strange. A behaviorist might say collectors are the unwitting victims of imprinting at an early age, the urge to collect no more than a fetish writ large. A Freudian might say the impulse arises from childhood loss or trauma; the sooner we realize we can never obtain that which we desire most—our father's exclusive love, say—the better. A capitalist might say we seek to corner the market on a particular good, to define ourselves not by who we are but what we own: Whoever dies with the most (_____) wins. What's inarguable is that collecting is highly subjective, depending on the upbringing, income, passions and pains of the individual collector. In his eyes, the desired object accrues value in excess of its usefulness, beauty or price tag. These factors miss the point. Collecting is about love. "Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects," says the philosopher Walter Benjamin in his essay, "Unpacking My Library." He adds, "Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them."

Under The Sun

Why do I live in white T-shirts? Perhaps because I grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, the farthest north city in North America, where function trumps everything. Patagonia, Filson, Royal Robbins, Carhartt and Extra Tuff are the designers of choice for the cabin-dwelling crowd. My grandmother may have had something to do with it, too. She was a passionate—some would say pathological—collector of beautiful things: clothes, china, silver, crystal, artwork and antiques. Rebelling against her, I may have formed my personal aesthetic around the idea of simplicity. Perhaps I picked white T-shirts because I'm now a single mother trying to survive on an assistant professor's salary. I couldn't collect post-Impressionist paintings even if I wanted to. But now I sound flip, and I don't mean to. In truth, the decorative arts strike a chord in me: a framed lithograph by an artist friend, a vase of fresh-cut lilacs, a cunning arrangement of dried starfish on the mantel. What I love best, though, are things I can use: a patchwork bedspread from Guatemala, a sleek cast-iron teapot from China, a hand-painted olive bowl from France. A new white T-shirt from Gap.

One of my younger sisters is an incontinent shopper. She can't walk into Wal-Mart without dropping a couple of hundred dollars. Target and Old Navy induce a kind of frenzy that is frightening to behold. She is pure id, this sister. Before shopping, she was addicted to food. She ate fast and furtively, hunched over the plate. Watching her, I once thought she would eat the world. Then she ballooned to over 300 pounds and nearly died from a medical condition complicated by obesity. To save her life, the surgeon stapled her stomach. Now my sister is svelte, and now she shops.

"Why do I let her drive me so crazy?" I'm on the phone with my other sister, girding myself for an upcoming weekend of family togetherness.

"Because," said my baby sister, "she wears on the outside all the insecurities we carry around on the inside."

Under The Sun

In the mid-1980s, the *Boston Globe* ran a profile of Sissela Bok. The reporter marveled at the way she juggled roles as scholar, teacher, mother, and wife of Derek Bok, then president of Harvard University. What's her secret?

"I don't shop," replied Sissela Bok.

I ping between my sister, who would buy everything, and Sissela Bok, who would—or so she says—buy nothing. Do I belong to the realm of ideas? Or to the world of January white sales? Where lies moderation, "the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues" (Joseph Hall, d. 1656)? The truth is, I love to shop. Always have. When I was little, and when my grandmother gave her some money, my mother would take my sisters and me to The Carousel, which was as exclusive as any shop in Frozen North could aspire to be. The clothes hung beneath clear plastic shields. New clothes—especially *these* new clothes—were a luxury. Usually, my dresses were handmade by my mother on her Singer sewing machine, or handed down from my older cousin Andrea. I associate The Carousel with other things that were out of place in that frontier childhood: my mother's diamond solitaire engagement ring from Tiffany's, for example. And I still remember the smell of the place: sweet and dry, like talcum powder, with overtones of starch and old lady. We were on our best behavior there, speaking in hushed voices, as in church. When I was in high school, the owner died and the store went out of business. At the final sale, my mother bought me a sleeveless white pique dress with green piping at the neck and waist. It was the most elegant thing I'd ever owned. Wearing it made me feel like Audrey Hepburn.

I've become a bit of a snob about where and when I shop. For example, I'd rather submit to an exploratory colonoscopy than a December afternoon at Shoppingtown Mall. I like tiny, dimly lit, quirky boutiques like the Pheasant's Eye, places where it's possible to imagine finding the one and only perfect thing—and simultaneously discovering that it is now marked down 50 percent.

Under The Sun

It seems to me that as a form of work, shopping resembles nothing so much as writing. Like writing, it demands vast, unrelieved stretches of time in which to imagine a self (*Is that me in a Cubist-print shirtwaist?*), re-imagine it (*What would happen if I wore a cashmere swing coat with a faux fur collar to the next faculty reception?*), and to wreak the tiniest of transformations (*I now must reckon myself a woman who possesses a pair of \$164 sandals*). Like writing, shopping is about play—and it's also about existential terror. At the cash register, I feel rich, cleansed, sated, generous, exhilarated. Also, I feel doubt, despair, guilt, and chest-constricting panic. To buy nothing is worse than buying something I can't afford, sort of like pressing the delete button on an unpromising essay. I leave the store exactly as I was when I walked in. No gain, no loss—except, perhaps, in terms of time.

I'm less neurotic about clothes than a lot of women I know. I might spend one morning in 50 rifling through my wardrobe, in a tizzy over nothing to wear, or—to be honest—nothing that doesn't make me look fat. I own three-season basics in taupe and black. Blouses in sage, sky and teal, garnet and amethyst. Shoes, boots and sandals in the requisite colors of bone, black, brown, navy and even red. I love running my hands over the fabrics: silk, linen, flax, cotton, wool, cashmere, and a slinky washable polyester. For the most part, I love my clothes and they love me back.

On chilly mornings, a white T-shirt is perfect for layering beneath sweaters or button-down shirts. In summer, I wear a white T under white linen. For marketing or book buying, a white T (long- or short-sleeved), worn with a wide brown belt, faded blue jeans and cowboy boots (memo to self: buy cowboy boots!) strikes the perfect note of carefree chic. I learned something new when I was 35 years old and drinking beer with a handful of friends who'd also come of age in the prudish '80s, when layers were good, and more layers were better. We were none of us prudes, but we *were* mystified by the growing trend of turning underwear

Under The Sun

into outerwear—for brandishing bra straps under a camisole, for slapping on overalls over nothing but a bra, for wearing a red bra under a peek-a-boo white blouse.

"I want to say to these girls, 'Didn't your mother tell you always, always to wear a flesh-colored bra under a white shirt?' " asked Helen, in her lilting South African accent.

"Yes!" chimed my friends.

Oops, thought I.

For a while, I took down my friends' white T-shirt histories. Lisa is a college librarian, tall and slender with green eyes and a shock of wavy, hennaed hair. She, too, went to college in the '80s. Nearly every day, she wore Levis 501 blue jeans, a Hanes white T-shirt, size extra small—"so it was just a little bit tight"—and a string of pearls. She meant to be sending mixed signals: man/woman, innocence/experience, passion/restraint. Dean is a red-blooded cowboy-cum-newspaper reporter in his mid-30s. His salacious mind leapt straight to wet T-shirt contests. Women reveal a lot about themselves through the fit of their T-shirts, he says. "The tighter they are, the more likely you'll be feeding your illegitimate brood with food stamps."

My friend Carrie has a sense of style so fresh and imaginative that another friend once described her as *sui generis*. A novelist, Carrie owns sundresses so complex that if they were buildings, they'd be Byzantine churches: billowy translucent overskirts and silk underskirts in a postmodern pastiche of patterns that would commit murder if worn by anyone with less panache. Checked gingham blouses over striped polyester skirts, cut on the bias. Suede clogs or Birkenstocks sandals. One Saturday in summer, when the temperature climbed to 100 degrees, she wore a straw hat, a white tank top and gauzy white pants to go blueberry picking. *Blueberry* picking!

Nothing is sexier on a man than a white T-shirt. Nothing is sexier on a woman than a man's white T-shirt. It is clean, force-

Under The Sun

ful, uncompromising in its plainness—not coy or prevaricating, like cream or ecru. It is underclothing that (unlike a fire-engine red bra) can properly be worn on the outside. A worn-out white T can do a useful turn as a child's paint smock or nightgown before hitting the ragbag. A writer friend wraps a strip of a worn-out white T-shirt around his head, pirate-style, when he works. "It helps to hold my brains in," he says.

I wear white T-shirts the way other women wear perfume. The air freshener in my car is a Yankee Candle creation called "Clean Cotton." It has a picture of (what else?) white T-shirts hanging on a clothesline. In our house, mine is the bedroom closest to the bathroom. Rather than schlep all the way to their own room for a pair of pajamas after their nightly bath, my daughters often help themselves to the contents of my middle drawer. With flushed skin and tousled hair, wearing one of my white T-shirts, a twin snuggles up to me on the couch while I read "Little Red Riding Hood."

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have."

"Mommy," says Emmy, burying her nose in the fabric. "It smells like you."

The history of the white T-shirt in America began during World War I, when our soldiers abroad observed the Europeans wearing a cotton undergarment to protect their skin from itchy wool uniforms. By World War II, the white T-shirt was standard issue as underwear for American soldiers. To wear a white T-shirt by itself—think Marlon Brando, Elvis Presley and John Wayne—in the '50s, was edgy and risqué. Picture James Dean lounging against a brick wall in the publicity poster for *Rebel Without a Cause*. His first act of rebellion would have been to expose a white T-shirt-clad chest beneath a nearly unzipped bomber jacket. By the '60s and '70s, the T-shirt was becoming acceptable as outerwear; usually, though, it was silk-screened, tie-dyed, or imprinted

Under The Sun

with a logo. Not until the '80s and '90s did the white T-shirt come into its own.

Just what do we mean, when we say that someone or something has come into its own? That it's popular, certainly. But why? The shape of the white T-shirt is rigorously plain: a vertical line topped by a quick horizontal dash, the capital T, vague allusion to the cross and Christ crucified. Its color conjures clouds, snowflakes, wedding gowns, a nun's wimple, the blank page. White welds surface to depth. I'm the sort of person who's read the review instead of the book, seen the trailer instead of the film. I'm caught up on *Harper's*, *The New Yorker* and *The American Scholar*, but Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* sits on my bookshelf, barely cracked. As with white T's, less is sometimes really less.

Then again, maybe not. Emerson admonishes us to live as simply as possible, to build ourselves plain houses and to furnish them plainly, thereby discouraging any would-be visitors with lavish tastes. Like a house stripped of all but necessities, a white T-shirt implies that its wearer's beauty is in the architecture, not the antiques. It doesn't catch or hold the casual gaze of a stranger. To wear a white T-shirt is to become a cipher, to enter the paradox of stasis and transformation, freedom and restraint. Possibility narrows until it becomes infinite. The shirt is the vessel into which the body—fat thin buxom budding muscle-bound suntanned tattooed pierced scarred—pours itself. It is form; the body, poetry.

Writing about clothing in this way makes me feel as if I'm confessing to a character flaw, some incompleteness in my psychological makeup. There's a bit of a stigma against a thinking woman who thinks only of clothes. Thoreau warns against "all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes." He's right, of course, yet I can't help feeling like a high school sophomore who fervently believes the right clothes will purchase her entre into the most exclusive clique, perhaps even take the popularity sweepstakes. From the high school scrapbook: A popular and exotically beautiful girl wore a white blouse to a

Under The Sun

disco dance. Under the black light, everything disappeared—skin, jeans, blouse—everything except her white bra, which glowed a macabre shade of blue and appeared to be dancing all by itself. By the next day, the girl's ratings had plummeted. She ended up marrying the class geek whose family owns a run-down convenience store on the outskirts of town.

From the post-college scrapbook: At a meeting for alumnae recruiters to my alma mater, we were told of a recent financial aid application. Under the heading of "family budget," the applicant's mother had penciled in \$2,000 per month for "recreational shopping." (Note the word *re*-creational. The woman needed \$2,000 a month to make herself new again.) My own grandmother spent that and more; she was a restless spirit, given to spending months at a time in hotel suites hundreds or thousands of miles from home. From wherever she traveled, she sent back finds by the truckload. She had the surest sense of style of anyone I've known (except, perhaps, my friend Carrie). Yet she'd drop \$500 for a pair of scarves she didn't need if the saleswoman at Tiffany's acted—as salesladies often did—as if my grandmother had taken a wrong turn while looking for Filene's Basement. The only thing separating my grandmother from your run-of-the-mill obsessive-compulsive shopper was good taste. I know of a woman of roughly my grandmother's age whose children had to move her into a new house just a few years before she died. She'd filled the old one from floor to ceiling with newspapers, receipts, canned goods, dime-store jewelry, even coils of hair salvaged from the bathtub drain. When the woman died, her heirs had to rent two industrial sized Dumpsters to clean out the *new* house.

Unbridled desire (itchy palms, pounding heart, stealthy looks to ensure that no one else has seen it, too) attaches itself to whatever is near at hand or just out of reach: that's the dark side of collecting. What of the light? What if, as Benjamin would have it, we find a way to live—and love—through our things? Can buy-

Under The Sun

ing something beautiful bridge the gap between what love we need and what love the world is able to give? I think it can. Perhaps you're thinking that beautiful things can't love you back, and perhaps you're right. But what is love if not a boomerang or beam of light that we send out into the world, hoping someday it will return?

Desire is tension; fulfillment, release. Western culture—art, exploration and science—has shaped itself around the trope of “I want”: More often than not, knowledge is the object of desire. Perhaps we humans are programmed at the molecular level to want, to get, then to want all over again: three steps that, after all, perfectly describe our relationship to food, sleep and sex. To go through life not knowing who or what our desire will attach itself to, or when, is terrifying. It's like skirting the edge of an abyss. If we can't contain the wanting, then we might not be able to control the getting, either. It seems to me that the collector is that rarity among human beings who has figured out something essential, which is no less than how to proscribe the possibilities for desire. (Meanwhile, in his single-minded pursuit of say, one copy of every book in the world, he might ruin himself financially and force his wife and children to live in squalor, as did Sir Thomas Phillipps, back in the 19th century).

The bloom is off the rose the instant it is picked. The value of a car plummets as soon as it is driven off the lot. The same is true of painted tiles and porcelain knobs, T-shirts and toile lampshades. Don Juan was a serial seducer of young virgins; Liz Taylor felt obliged to marry her conquests. With collectors, the latest find ceases to enchant as soon as it hangs on the wall, ornaments the body, or says, “I do.” Getting and spending don't lay waste a collector's powers; they *are* the collector's powers. The notion that somewhere out there in the wide, wide world is the one thing that would complete the collection, that would com-

Under The Sun

plete the collector, seems enough to get a body out of bed in the morning.

The difference between the pathological collector (Sir Thomas Phillipps) and the casual one (me) is time. I don't mean he had more time than I do, but rather that his relationship to time—his urge to control it—was stronger than mine. True, I'd like to stop the clock once in a while. That rare and unforeseen stretch of 15 unscheduled minutes feels like such a gift that, caught unawares, I might fritter it away in the unwrapping, in trying to figure out how best to use it. How many errands can I run in 15 minutes or less? The post office and the dry cleaners? The post office, the dry cleaners and the bank? OK, but what if I were to dash into the bookshop to pick up a card for a friend whose mother just died? No, no, no: it's all too much. Which errand must be run today, and which can wait until tomorrow? See the big white rabbit with its enormous pocket watch? *Tick tick tick tock. I'm late, I'm late, I'm late for a very important date.* There is so much to see and accomplish; so many people to meet and places to go; chores to do, errands to run, groceries to buy, books to read, meaningless data to sift through in the endless pursuit of gold among the dross. Seeking the perfect white T-shirt sometimes strikes me as the only way to short-circuit despair.

Once, foolishly, I made an appointment for 2:30 on one side of town and another for 3 p.m. on the other side. When I told a friend about it, he laughingly told me I'd made a "hole in time." What is a hole in time but that fleeting moment when internal emotion and external representation—id and ego—slip into equilibrium? Likewise, when we buy something we really want, we make a hole in time. It becomes the objective correlative of our desire somehow to transcend what cannot be transcended, to arrest our headlong, helpless skid toward the abyss.

To love something well is to expose it to the elements most likely to bring about its demise. In the case of a white T-shirt,

Under The Sun

these include ketchup, soy sauce, makeup, guacamole, paint, blueberry pie, and red wine. Fried chicken is problematic, too. At my age (nearly 40), I have yet to undergo the rite of passage that marks most people's entry into adulthood: the ability to get through a single meal without spilling. I come by this trait honestly. In her later years, my grandmother—the collector—was a chronic dribbler. She wore blouses made of the finest linen or silk, Hermes scarves, intricate lace collars—all of them stained, by day's end, with remnants of her lunch or dinner, with ink from her pen, with the paw prints of her adoring dog, Ripper. She loved beautiful things, especially clothes, and she loved to eat. She embraced the latter with little heed for the former. She knew the clock was ticking. She knew that a woman can save time, save money, save money, save furniture, save clothes, save *herself* until the day she dies. Or she can spend it all every minute of the day.

If, by some miracle, one of my white T-shirt cheats premature death by spillage, it eventually grows limp, dingy, yellowish under the arms. After being yanked over my head a hundred times, the neckband stretches. The dryer wreaks havoc, too; where the T-shirt was already marginal, it now grows tight. For a while, Clorox is my friend. Then the fabric weakens and falls apart like wet tissue paper.

I once owned the perfect white T-shirt. My grandmother and I were on a freighter bound for South America when I found it in one of her trunks. She, generous as always, let me keep it. That was nearly 15 years ago, but I still recall the substantial heft of the fabric, the cunning flattery of the cut, the way the T-shirt seemed to work with everything else in my wardrobe. If I'd known then that I'd probably never see its like again, I'd have savored it more—and worn it less. "The essence of being human," writes George Orwell, in "Reflections on Ghandi," "is that one does not seek perfection." Perfection is static. One may arguably seek it, but one will never find it because of the human necessity of en-

gaging, moment by moment, with time. Not to seek perfection leads to one kind of death; finding it to another.

Once or twice, sifting through stacks of neatly folded white T-shirts at Gap or Banana Republic or Chico's, I've run across what I thought, fleetingly, was the long-lost twin of the perfect white T-shirt. I've bought compulsively, without bothering to try anything on, only to discover later on that it was not, in fact, perfect—that it possessed one or more of the flaws endemic to the type. The neck was too high or (rarely) too low. The fabric tugged or, worse, sagged across the bust. The body was too long to tuck into a pair of jeans without creating bulk at the waist. Or it was so short it threatened to expose my extremely un-Britney Spears-like navel. Occasionally, the shininess of the fabric drew attention to itself, asserting that it ought, by rights, to be the star of the show that is me. I've known women who were worn by their clothes and not the other way around. I don't intend to be one of them.

A few weeks ago, my daughters and I met up with friends for a weekend at Virginia Beach. After a day of paddling in the surf and broiling in the sand, we drove back to our hotel and showered. Then we rendezvoused in the hall to figure out dinner. Suzanne was wearing khaki shorts and a gorgeous white T-shirt, perhaps even the perfect white T-shirt. It was made of cotton so thin as to be almost translucent, with a jewel neckline and beautifully finished hems. The cut was what I think of as European.

"I love that T-shirt! Where'd you get it?"

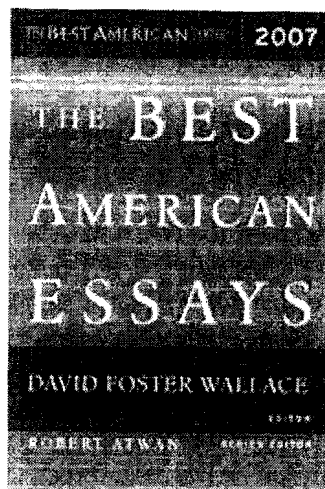
"Silly girl," Suzanne replied. "You gave me this T-shirt last year. You said it looked terrible on you."

To buy a new white T-shirt constitutes a leap of faith. I'm not Catholic, but everything in me embraces the idea of transubstantiation, of host becoming Host through a mystical process involving Latinate phrases and an ordained priest. At the moment of the transaction, time hangs in suspension; then the moment passes, leaving the recipient fundamentally altered by contact with

Under The Sun

the Divine. The vehicle (bread or wine) is commonplace; through faith and language, it becomes timeless, transcendent.

When I get it home, the Fresh Produce T from the Pheasant's Eye in Lynchburg disappoints: the fabric is too thin to be practical for work. The cut displays my attributes in a way that tempts a particular kind of man to talk to my breasts. Even so, it will do as a stopgap until the next time I go shopping. One day soon, I'll drive into Charlottesville. The last time I was there, I spotted a promising white T in a sporting goods store. The shirt was made by Patagonia of thick cotton, pre-washed to baby-blanket softness. The cut alluded to the traditional man's T but conceded a fair amount to a woman's curves. I checked the price: \$49.95—a small price to pay, really, for the promise of re-creation, for a still point in the spinning world, for a blank slate on which to write the story of me. If only it had been available in my size.



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In his introduction, David Foster Wallace makes the spirited case that "many of these essays are valuable simply as exhibits of what a first-rate artistic mind can make of particular fact-sets -- whether these involve the 17-kHz ring tones of some kids' cell phones, the language of movement as parsed by dogs, the near-infinity of ways to experience and describe an earthquake, the existential synecdoche of stagefright, or the revelation that most of what you've believed and revered turns out to be self-indulgent crap."

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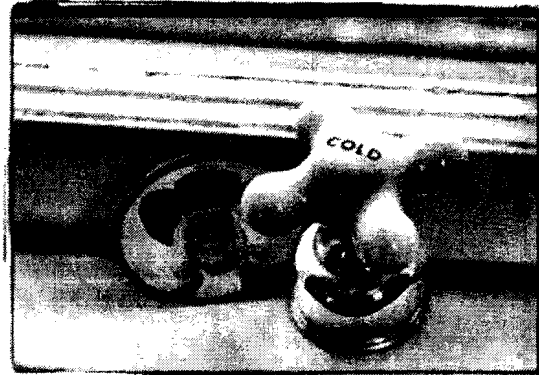
Brevity 26

[Brevity Home](#)
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Oatmeal

By Patricia Twomey Ryan

The kitchen in our brick row house was always cold in the early morning. Chilled and shivering, I sat on the cracked vinyl chair and huddled against the small radiator in the corner. My stomach rumbled as I stole a few forbidden sucks on my six-year-old thumb. In the dim overhead light, I watched as my mother poured the oats into a big black pot. That morning it was the Irish oatmeal, my favorite, on other days it was the oats from the Quaker man. I stretched the loose legs of my underwear down past my knees. Woollies we called them but they were not made of wool, just faded pink cotton.



Winter had come early that year and the gray sky offered little outside light. I dreaded mornings in those days, thoughts of school haunted me and I would often leave the house claiming sickness and begging to stay home. I peered across the alleyway and looked into the still darkened window of the Sullivan's kitchen. It looked as if it might rain or maybe snow. Not the bright white snow of deep winter just those fat, wet late November snowflakes that turned into slush and sloshed over the sides of my brown oxfords as I walked slowly to school. The radiator hissed as the heat came up and the pipes clanged and banged.

My mother, up since six, stood at the stove, her flowered housedress covered with a worn white apron, its strings wrapped around her waist and tied in the front. Her short brown hair was secured in a net. I hated that hair net. My best friend, Kathy Watson's mother wore her hair long and wavy down to her shoulders and I wanted my mother to look like that. But of course she never would. Kathy's mother wore stylish clothes that snugly fit her slim figure, rouge on her cheeks and even a little perfume. My mother always wore a housedress unless going to church or work. Her hair was always in a net and she smelled of roasts and onions and pies.

As I yawned, my mother stirred and the earthy smell of oats began to fill the room. The steam rising from the pot fogged the window and the kitchen began to warm. The tabletop in front of me was tin, dulled yellow with faded green trim. There were worn spots where the plates were always set for dinner. On mornings like this, the tin top stayed cold to the touch so I leaned even closer to the radiator. As it heated up, I readjusted my body, twisting and turning, first the left arm then the right, front, back, sideways, each piece of me getting a few minutes of the precious heat.

Finally, it was ready. My mother scooped spoonfuls of oatmeal into a chipped blue bowl, generous white speckled dollops with flecks of brown and gold, never gray. She placed the bowl before me, and the steam drifted up toward my nose as she poured a stream of warm milk on top. Savoring the anticipation, I tipped the bowl this way and that making winding, white rivers that coursed lazily over the surface. When I could resist no longer, I reached in for that first, perfect spoonful. Creamy, hot oatmeal coated my tongue, the milk slipping around my mouth, and as I swallowed, the warmth rushed through me so completely, I curled my toes.

I knew that it would be cold walking down Perry Avenue. That my legs would sting bright red from above my white anklets to below my blue pleated skirt. That my St. Brendan's beanie would not keep my ears warm or my neck dry and that Sister Miriam Patrick was going to be angry because I didn't have my spelling words. I knew that my mother would never be young and stylish and that my pleas to stay home would be denied. But for that moment, as I sat in the corner of the kitchen, steam heat outside me and warm oatmeal in, I was content.

Patricia Twomey Ryan is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Parents*, *Modern Maturity* and the journal *Eire - Ireland*.

[Next Essay](#)

Poynteronline

Posted, Apr. 23, 1995

Updated, Sep. 16, 2003

Tips for Writing a Personal Essay

By Chip Scanlan (more by author)



Journalists fear the "I" word, maybe even more than a libel suit. Writing about yourself is often difficult for reporters and editors whose work lives focus on others. But writing about yourself, honestly, even painfully, will make you a better reporter and editor: more empathetic, more skilled, better able to spot the universal truth in the individual story.

Personal writing also generates enormous reader response. (And who knows, you might even be able to make some money!)

I. Finding Your Subject - How do I decide what to write about?

Writers in search of a subject might ask themselves these questions suggested by *Boston Globe* columnist and writing coach Don Murray:

- What are you thinking about when you're not thinking?
- What makes you mad?
- What makes you happy?
- What past events were turning points in your life that you'd like to understand?
- What do you know you should write about but have been afraid to?

II. Discovering Your Story: How do I get started?

As you think about topics and begin to write, consider these comments from two deft personal essayists:

"You can't write a personal column without going to some very deep place inside yourself, even if it's only for four hours. It's almost like psychotherapy, except you're doing it on your own. You have to pull something out of yourself and give away some important part of yourself...It's a gift you have to give to the reader, even if it's the most light-hearted piece in the world."

Jennifer Allen, *The New York Times*

"Feeling is at the basis of everything. When I was asked to consider becoming a full-time columnist, part of my hesitation was that I knew I could not pretend to be this dispassionate, all-knowing, authoritarian voice on high. I couldn't do that. That would be a lie....For me, it's like *The Godfather*. Everything is personal."

Donna Britt, *The Washington Post*

- **Write every day.**

Writing is a process of discovery. You will discover what you want to say and how to say it in just one way: by writing. "You don't know the story until you've written it," Murray says.

Begin, as Cynthia Gorney described the beginnings of her powerful pieces for *The Washington Post*, with babble. Surprise yourself, as she does, by discovering the story you want to write halfway down the page.

- **Lower your standards.**

Ignore the voice that says "This stinks" - The first step to producing copy on deadline in time for revision that storytelling demands. The first draft contains the promise of the final one.

III. Learning to self-edit: How do I get published?

- **Rewrite.**

"You write to discover what you want to say," Murray says. "You rewrite to discover what you have said and then rewrite to make it clear to other people."

- **Submit**
- **Don't give up**

The Last Word

The personal essay assignment demands the critical thinking, communication, and collaborative skills required of today's journalist. This is not about therapy; it's about craft. Memoir, the writer Patricia Hampl says, is about exploration, not revelation. Like all good journalism, that requires solid reporting, critical thinking, careful editing, the skills we all hope to improve.

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Jonathan Neal

Mrs. Carmony

Period 3

January 5, 2003

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Band Problems

Each year the New Castle Trojan Marching Band begins its season with high hopes to advance to state finals. Even though state finals are not until late October, the band begins to practice in early May. The members spend the month of May reviewing marching techniques and learning to play the music for the show. Throughout the summer, the band works on perfecting the techniques, learning the movements of the show, and memorizing the music. The contest season starts in early September. The whole goal of the season is to compete in state finals at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis. I have just finished my fourth year as a member of the marching band. Unfortunately, for the past two years, we have not advanced to state finals. After consecutively being a state finalist for nine years, the band of 2000 could not continue this pattern. One of the reasons the band is not as competitive is the lack of students involved in the program. The community and school system could solve this problem by providing activities that would encourage students to participate in band.

Because band activities and trips are very costly, it could be hard to organize events encouraging students to be in band. The benefits, however, of the events would later outweigh the disadvantages of the price. The idea of the directors taking the eighth graders to see the Class A and B state finals would be influential. The

finals are the "finished product." They are exciting, prestigious, and rewarding.

Thousands of people each year attend. Also, they are held in downtown Indianapolis where the Colts play. The day could consist of watching 10 bands in the morning, breaking for lunch, going to Circle Center Mall, and then returning in the evening to watch the Class A bands. These are the largest bands. This past year Homestead High School had 281 members in their band. The sight of a large and talented band like Homestead could inspire the eighth graders to want to participate. Certainly the trip to the competition would require money, chaperones, and buses, but if people could cover these expenses and positions, the trip would be a highlight in the year of these students.

The younger band members also need to feel a connection with the older TMB members. One way to provide this connection would be for the directors to allow the eighth graders to join the high school band for several basketball games. The games start in late November. The last home game is in February. During these months, many middle school students have little to do and need an outlet for their energy. Most of the eighth graders find that attending the games is fun and a way for them to be with their friends. If the ^{younger} students in band could be allowed to play with the older band members, they would feel that they had a role in the game. Whenever I play, I feel that by playing loud I add to the intensity of the game. The eighth graders would enjoy playing the music because the songs are exciting, loud, and well known. The students could also have time between the quarters to talk to the older band members. This could result in friendships between the younger and older members. One of my best

friends was a year older than I was and was in band. He led me to want to be in it.

Through this simple avenue, many students would be interested in being in band.

In order to draw sixth graders, high school band students could visit the elementary schools. Teachers would have to give their consent to their students to take this opportunity, but if many students participated, a student would only have to do this one time. One way of promising the band to be promoted would be for the seniors to talk to the sixth grade classes. This talk could include the reason he/she chose to be in band, the various instruments students could choose to play, and the fun trips the band takes. Sixth graders look to students in high school as role models. They want to be just like them "when they grow up." The students could also bring their instruments to show the elementary students. The ultimate motivator would be if the high school students could play as a modern "band." The "band" would not be directed. There could be an electric guitar, drum set, bass, and a couple instruments. The older students could point out to them that the first step in organizing their own "band" would be to learn an instrument. This idea would be "cool" to the kids and thereby promote the band program.

In the future, I hope to see the community and school system providing activities to promote the band program. Through these efforts, students' participation and interest can increase. This could greatly increase the numbers in the marching band. With the increase in numbers, the community will be more likely to donate money for the cause. Although going to state finals is strictly based on what six judges think, the band's chances of being very competitive would triple, thus restoring their pride. The hard work, sweat, and early morning practices could not stop their motivation. With

focus and purpose, New Castle has the ability once again to intimidate Avon, Northview, Concord, and Jasper. The solution lies in our hands, and the goal is in our reach.

Jonathan Neal

Mrs. Carmony

Period 3

January 5, 2003

ASK ME

It was the first day of my freshman year in high school. I must admit that I was a little nervous. It was a much bigger school than middle school. I had trouble figuring out where the B and M wings were located. I wondered if I would make it through four years. I was the common freshman. Early in the week, however, my fears were calmed. My class had our orientation and tour through the building. Upper classmen, who wore orange shirts, led the orientation. They presented fun skits to inform us of the rules. I enjoyed the skit about fighting and peer mediation the most. I thought the people in the orange shirts that said "Ask Me" on the front were the coolest people ever. They were friendly and smiled continuously. I remember such names as Leslie Dye, Kristin Cox, and Ross Strong as a part of this ^{select} selective circle. I decided then that I wanted to be in this cluster of people. This past year I became a member of this group. I wore the orange shirt and participated in the skit on peer mediation. The people that are in peer are in charge of the orientation. Peer is a class. The purpose of the class is to allow upper classmen the chance to be a friend and work with younger students who have problems. Peer class is now my favorite part of school.

Many of my closest friends are in peer with me. This makes it enjoyable and comfortable to be in the class. The first day I went to class, there were only a few people who I did not know. In the past 18 weeks, these people have become my very

good friends also. Our teacher, Mrs. Harvey, told us at the beginning of the year that we would be close by the end of the year. My first thought was that we were already close. I felt that I knew everyone very well. The first week of school proved me wrong. We took time to present ourselves to the class. After that time, I had a greater appreciation for everyone. I found out the joys, hurts, and experiences of my fellow classmates. I believe this created a bond between us that ~~one~~^{we} would never get in an ordinary classroom setting. Throughout the semester, we have had to work together as a team. One of our responsibilities is to do community service. Many times during the fall, I picked up trash with two of my classmates. It doesn't sound very fun, but it turned out to be a time for us to talk and let out our stress. We also have played many games where the objective is to get to know one another better. We are honest and therefore, we developed a respect one for another.

The whole goal of the class is to help younger students who have problems or simply need a friend. Our teacher gives us referrals from other teachers. We meet with these students on a designated day of the week. Currently, I am working with three students. Two of them go to Eastwood Elementary, and I have one student who attends Wilbur Wright Elementary. I spend around 35 minutes with my student each day. I look forward to meeting with the students. They look up to me as a role model, *and* Many of them come from dysfunctional families and have learning disabilities. I play games with the kids and go out to recess with them. Sometimes I just sit and talk to them. Most of the time, however, I allow them to do the talking. I listen. By the end of the year, I hope to have made a difference in their lives. This will take time and patience. My goal is to build a relationship with them, which will be a positive influence

on their lives. After I leave the school, I go out to eat with my fellow classmates. I love not having to eat at the high school and being able to get away for an hour and a half. I look forward ^{of} everyday to spending time with my buddy and eating away from school.

I have learned many valuable lessons in peer. Unfortunately, I know that much of the material that I have learned is of little use to me. I will rarely have to remember how to graph a hyperbola or who fought in the Battle of Midway. In peer, however, I have learned basic fundamentals of communication and relationships. The first twelve weeks of the class, we did not go out to the schools. Mrs. Harvey taught us how to be successful peer facilitators and mediators. I learned how to ^{peer information} properly confront a situation. I learned about human feelings and emotions. Mrs. Harvey taught us how to be assertive in our communication. Our class had several speakers come in and speak on such topics as anger and child abuse. Experience with my 'buddies' has taught me more than any book or teacher. I have learned how to be persistent, patient, and a good listener.

chopping style - sentences all too much the same length

Peer has become my favorite part of the school day. It has taught me valuable lessons, given me a chance to get away from the monotony of school, and ~~has~~ helped me build strong friendships. It is one class that I look forward to going to every day. I enjoy the games of checkers with my buddies. I love the breath of fresh air that I get when I leave the school. The sandwiches at Wendy's taste much better than the daily pizza with chocolate cake and orange juice at school. Most importantly, I can now wear my orange shirt that says "Ask Me" to school with pride. Just please don't ask me where the T wing is...I'm still not exactly sure.

good class



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Ralph Waldo Emerson - Texts

Friendship

from Essays: First Series (1841)

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A ruddy drop of manly blood
The surging sea outweighs,
The world uncertain comes and goes,
The lover rooted stays.
I fancied he was fled,
And, after many a year,
Glowed unexhausted kindness
Like daily sunrise there.
My careful heart was free again, —
O friend, my bosom said,
Through thee alone the sky is arched,
Through thee the rose is red,
All things through thee take nobler form,
And look beyond the earth,
And is the mill-round of our fate
A sun-path in thy worth.
Me too thy nobleness has taught
To master my despair;
The fountains of my hidden life
Are through thy friendship fair.

ESSAY VI *Friendship*

We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken. Maugre all the selfishness that chills like east winds the world, the whole human family is bathed with an element of love like a fine ether. How many persons we meet in houses, whom we scarcely speak to, whom yet we honor, and who honor us! How many we see in the street, or sit with in church, whom, though silently, we warmly rejoice to be with! Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth.

Friendship

Home

Up

Texts

Search

Look Up Word

Discuss

Site Map

Transcendentalism

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Contact

Essays: First Series

Essays: Second Series

Nature: Addresses/Lectures

Representative Men

English Traits

The Conduct of Life

Lectures / Biographies

Letters and Social Aims

Early Emerson Poems

Uncollected Prose

Government of Children

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Self-Reliance

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Spiritual Laws

Love

Friendship

Prudence

Heroism

The Over-Soul

Circles

Intellect

Art

The effect of the indulgence of this human affection is a certain cordial exhilaration. In poetry, and in common speech, the emotions of benevolence and complacency which are felt towards others are likened to the material effects of fire; so swift, or much more swift, more active, more cheering, are these fine inward irradiations. From the highest degree of passionate love, to the lowest degree of good-will, they make the sweetness of life.

Our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection. The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend, — and, forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words. See, in any house where virtue and self-respect abide, the palpitation which the approach of a stranger causes. A commended stranger is expected and announced, and an uneasiness betwixt pleasure and pain invades all the hearts of a household. His arrival almost brings fear to the good hearts that would welcome him. The house is dusted, all things fly into their places, the old coat is exchanged for the new, and they must get up a dinner if they can. Of a commended stranger, only the good report is told by others, only the good and new is heard by us. He stands to us for humanity. He is what we wish. Having imagined and invested him, we ask how we should stand related in conversation and action with such a man, and are uneasy with fear. The same idea exalts conversation with him. We talk better than we are wont. We have the nimblest fancy, a richer memory, and our dumb devil has taken leave for the time. For long hours we can continue a series of sincere, graceful, rich communications, drawn from the oldest, secretest experience, so that they who sit by, of our own kinsfolk and acquaintance, shall feel a lively surprise at our unusual powers. But as soon as the stranger begins to intrude his partialities, his definitions, his defects, into the conversation, it is all over. He has heard the first, the last and best he will ever hear from us. He is no stranger now. Vulgarity, ignorance, misapprehension are old acquaintances. Now, when he comes, he may get the order, the dress, and the dinner, — but the throbbing of the heart, and the communications of the soul, no more.

What is so pleasant as these jets of affection which make a young world for me again? What so delicious as a just and firm encounter of two, in a thought, in a feeling? How beautiful, on their approach to this beating heart, the steps and forms of the gifted and the true! The moment we indulge our affections, the earth is metamorphosed; there is no winter, and no night; all tragedies, all ennuis, vanish, — all duties even; nothing fills the proceeding eternity but the forms all radiant of beloved persons. Let the soul be assured that somewhere

in the universe it should rejoin its friend, and it would be content and cheerful alone for a thousand years.

I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts? I chide society, I embrace solitude, and yet I am not so ungrateful as not to see the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded, as from time to time they pass my gate. Who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine, — a possession for all time. Nor is nature so poor but she gives me this joy several times, and thus we weave social threads of our own, a new web of relations; and, as many thoughts in succession substantiate themselves, we shall by and by stand in a new world of our own creation, and no longer strangers and pilgrims in a traditionary globe. My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one. High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts. These are new poetry of the first Bard, — poetry without stop, — hymn, ode, and epic, poetry still flowing, Apollo and the Muses chanting still. Will these, too, separate themselves from me again, or some of them? I know not, but I fear it not; for my relation to them is so pure, that we hold by simple affinity, and the Genius of my life being thus social, the same affinity will exert its energy on whomsoever is as noble as these men and women, wherever I may be.

I confess to an extreme tenderness of nature on this point. It is almost dangerous to me to "crush the sweet poison of misused wine" of the affections. A new person is to me a great event, and hinders me from sleep. I have often had fine fancies about persons which have given me delicious hours; but the joy ends in the day; it yields no fruit. Thought is not born of it; my action is very little modified. I must feel pride in my friend's accomplishments as if they were mine, — and a property in his virtues. I feel as warmly when he is praised, as the lover when he hears applause of his engaged maiden. We over-estimate the conscience of our friend. His goodness seems better than our goodness, his nature finer, his temptations less. Every thing that is his, — his name, his form, his dress, books, and instruments, — fancy enhances. Our own thought sounds new and larger from his mouth.

Yet the systole and diastole of the heart are not without their analogy in the ebb and flow of love. Friendship, like the immortality of the

soul, is too good to be believed. The lover, beholding his maiden, half knows that she is not verily that which he worships; and in the golden hour of friendship, we are surprised with shades of suspicion and unbelief. We doubt that we bestow on our hero the virtues in which he shines, and afterwards worship the form to which we have ascribed this divine inhabitation. In strictness, the soul does not respect men as it respects itself. In strict science all persons underlie the same condition of an infinite remoteness. Shall we fear to cool our love by mining for the metaphysical foundation of this Elysian temple? Shall I not be as real as the things I see? If I am, I shall not fear to know them for what they are. Their essence is not less beautiful than their appearance, though it needs finer organs for its apprehension. The root of the plant is not unsightly to science, though for chaplets and festoons we cut the stem short. And I must hazard the production of the bald fact amidst these pleasing reveries, though it should prove an Egyptian skull at our banquet. A man who stands united with his thought conceives magnificently of himself. He is conscious of a universal success, even though bought by uniform particular failures. No advantages, no powers, no gold or force, can be any match for him. I cannot choose but rely on my own poverty more than on your wealth. I cannot make your consciousness tantamount to mine. Only the star dazzles; the planet has a faint, moon-like ray. I hear what you say of the admirable parts and tried temper of the party you praise, but I see well that for all his purple cloaks I shall not like him, unless he is at last a poor Greek like me. I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee also in its pied and painted immensity, — thee, also, compared with whom all else is shadow. Thou art not Being, as Truth is, as Justice is, — thou art not my soul, but a picture and effigy of that. Thou hast come to me lately, and already thou art seizing thy hat and cloak. Is it not that the soul puts forth friends as the tree puts forth leaves, and presently, by the germination of new buds, extrudes the old leaf? The law of nature is alternation for evermore. Each electrical state superinduces the opposite. The soul environs itself with friends, that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; and it goes alone for a season, that it may exalt its conversation or society. This method betrays itself along the whole history of our personal relations. The instinct of affection revives the hope of union with our mates, and the returning sense of insulation recalls us from the chase. Thus every man passes his life in the search after friendship, and if he should record his true sentiment, he might write a letter like this to each new candidate for his love.

DEAR FRIEND: —

If I was sure of thee, sure of thy capacity, sure to match my mood with thine, I should never think again of trifles in relation to thy

comings and goings. I am not very wise; my moods are quite attainable; and I respect thy genius; it is to me as yet unfathomed; yet dare I not presume in thee a perfect intelligence of me, and so thou art to me a delicious torment. Thine ever, or never.

Yet these uneasy pleasures and fine pains are for curiosity, and not for life. They are not to be indulged. This is to weave cobweb, and not cloth. Our friendships hurry to short and poor conclusions, because we have made them a texture of wine and dreams, instead of the tough fibre of the human heart. The laws of friendship are austere and eternal, of one web with the laws of nature and of morals. But we have aimed at a swift and petty benefit, to suck a sudden sweetness. We snatch at the slowest fruit in the whole garden of God, which many summers and many winters must ripen. We seek our friend not sacredly, but with an adulterate passion which would appropriate him to ourselves. In vain. We are armed all over with subtle antagonisms, which, as soon as we meet, begin to play, and translate all poetry into stale prose. Almost all people descend to meet. All association must be a compromise, and, what is worst, the very flower and aroma of the flower of each of the beautiful natures disappears as they approach each other. What a perpetual disappointment is actual society, even of the virtuous and gifted! After interviews have been compassed with long foresight, we must be tormented presently by baffled blows, by sudden, unseasonable apathies, by epilepsies of wit and of animal spirits, in the heyday of friendship and thought. Our faculties do not play us true, and both parties are relieved by solitude.

I ought to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference how many friends I have, and what content I can find in conversing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. If I have shrunk unequal from one contest, the joy I find in all the rest becomes mean and cowardly. I should hate myself, if then I made my other friends my asylum.

"The valiant warrior famed for fight,
After a hundred victories, once foiled,
Is from the book of honor razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled."

Our impatience is thus sharply rebuked. Bashfulness and apathy are a tough husk, in which a delicate organization is protected from premature ripening. It would be lost if it knew itself before any of the best souls were yet ripe enough to know and own it. Respect the *naturlangsamkeit* which hardens the ruby in a million years, and works in duration, in which Alps and Andes come and go as rainbows. The good spirit of our life has no heaven which is the price

of rashness. Love, which is the essence of God, is not for levity, but for the total worth of man. Let us not have this childish luxury in our regards, but the austere worth; let us approach our friend with an audacious trust in the truth of his heart, in the breadth, impossible to be overturned, of his foundations.

The attractions of this subject are not to be resisted, and I leave, for the time, all account of subordinate social benefit, to speak of that select and sacred relation which is a kind of absolute, and which even leaves the language of love suspicious and common, so much is this purer, and nothing is so much divine.

I do not wish to treat friendships daintily, but with roughest courage. When they are real, they are not glass threads or frostwork, but the solidest thing we know. For now, after so many ages of experience, what do we know of nature, or of ourselves? Not one step has man taken toward the solution of the problem of his destiny. In one condemnation of folly stand the whole universe of men. But the sweet sincerity of joy and peace, which I draw from this alliance with my brother's soul, is the nut itself, whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell. Happy is the house that shelters a friend! It might well be built, like a festal bower or arch, to entertain him a single day. Happier, if he know the solemnity of that relation, and honor its law! He who offers himself a candidate for that covenant comes up, like an Olympian, to the great games, where the first-born of the world are the competitors. He proposes himself for contests where Time, Want, Danger, are in the lists, and he alone is victor who has truth enough in his constitution to preserve the delicacy of his beauty from the wear and tear of all these. The gifts of fortune may be present or absent, but all the speed in that contest depends on intrinsic nobleness, and the contempt of trifles. There are two elements that go to the composition of friendship, each so sovereign that I can detect no superiority in either, no reason why either should be first named. One is Truth. A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal, that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another. Sincerity is the luxury allowed, like diadems and authority, only to the highest rank, *that* being permitted to speak truth, as having none above it to court or conform unto. Every man alone is sincere. At the entrance of a second person, hypocrisy begins. We parry and fend the approach of our fellow-man by compliments, by gossip, by amusements, by affairs. We cover up our thought from him under a hundred folds. I knew a man, who, under a certain religious frenzy, cast off this drapery, and, omitting all

compliment and commonplace, spoke to the conscience of every person he encountered, and that with great insight and beauty. At first he was resisted, and all men agreed he was mad. But persisting, as indeed he could not help doing, for some time in this course, he attained to the advantage of bringing every man of his acquaintance into true relations with him. No man would think of speaking falsely with him, or of putting him off with any chat of markets or reading-rooms. But every man was constrained by so much sincerity to the like plaindealing, and what love of nature, what poetry, what symbol of truth he had, he did certainly show him. But to most of us society shows not its face and eye, but its side and its back. To stand in true relations with men in a false age is worth a fit of insanity, is it not? We can seldom go erect. Almost every man we meet requires some civility, — requires to be humored; he has some fame, some talent, some whim of religion or philanthropy in his head that is not to be questioned, and which spoils all conversation with him. But a friend is a sane man who exercises not my ingenuity, but me. My friend gives me entertainment without requiring any stipulation on my part. A friend, therefore, is a sort of paradox in nature. I who alone am, I who see nothing in nature whose existence I can affirm with equal evidence to my own, behold now the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety, and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form; so that a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.

The other element of friendship is tenderness. We are holden to men by every sort of tie, by blood, by pride, by fear, by hope, by lucre, by lust, by hate, by admiration, by every circumstance and badge and trifle, but we can scarce believe that so much character can subsist in another as to draw us by love. Can another be so blessed, and we so pure, that we can offer him tenderness? When a man becomes dear to me, I have touched the goal of fortune. I find very little written directly to the heart of this matter in books. And yet I have one text which I cannot choose but remember. My author says, — "I offer myself faintly and bluntly to those whose I effectually am, and tender myself least to him to whom I am the most devoted." I wish that friendship should have feet, as well as eyes and eloquence. It must plant itself on the ground, before it vaults over the moon. I wish it to be a little of a citizen, before it is quite a cherub. We chide the citizen because he makes love a commodity. It is an exchange of gifts, of useful loans; it is good neighbourhood; it watches with the sick; it holds the pall at the funeral; and quite loses sight of the delicacies and nobility of the relation. But though we cannot find the god under this disguise of a sutler, yet, on the other hand, we cannot forgive the poet if he spins his thread too fine, and does not substantiate his romance by the municipal virtues of justice, punctuality, fidelity, and pity. I hate the prostitution of the

name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances. I much prefer the company of ploughboys and tin-peddlers, to the silken and perfumed amity which celebrates its days of encounter by a frivolous display, by rides in a curricule, and dinners at the best taverns. The end of friendship is a commerce the most strict and homely that can be joined; more strict than any of which we have experience. It is for aid and comfort through all the relations and passages of life and death. It is fit for serene days, and graceful gifts, and country rambles, but also for rough roads and hard fare, shipwreck, poverty, and persecution. It keeps company with the sallies of the wit and the trances of religion. We are to dignify to each other the daily needs and offices of man's life, and embellish it by courage, wisdom, and unity. It should never fall into something usual and settled, but should be alert and inventive, and add rhyme and reason to what was drudgery.

Friendship may be said to require natures so rare and costly, each so well tempered and so happily adapted, and withal so circumstanced, (for even in that particular, a poet says, love demands that the parties be altogether paired,) that its satisfaction can very seldom be assured. It cannot subsist in its perfection, say some of those who are learned in this warm lore of the heart, betwixt more than two. I am not quite so strict in my terms, perhaps because I have never known so high a fellowship as others. I please my imagination more with a circle of godlike men and women variously related to each other, and between whom subsists a lofty intelligence. But I find this law of *one to one* peremptory for conversation, which is the practice and consummation of friendship. Do not mix waters too much. The best mix as ill as good and bad. You shall have very useful and cheering discourse at several times with two several men, but let all three of you come together, and you shall not have one new and hearty word. Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort. In good company there is never such discourse between two, across the table, as takes place when you leave them alone. In good company, the individuals merge their egotism into a social soul exactly co-extensive with the several consciousnesses there present. No partialities of friend to friend, no fondnesses of brother to sister, of wife to husband, are there pertinent, but quite otherwise. Only he may then speak who can sail on the common thought of the party, and not poorly limited to his own. Now this convention, which good sense demands, destroys the high freedom of great conversation, which requires an absolute running of two souls into one.

No two men but, being left alone with each other, enter into simpler relations. Yet it is affinity that determines *which* two shall converse. Unrelated men give little joy to each other; will never suspect the